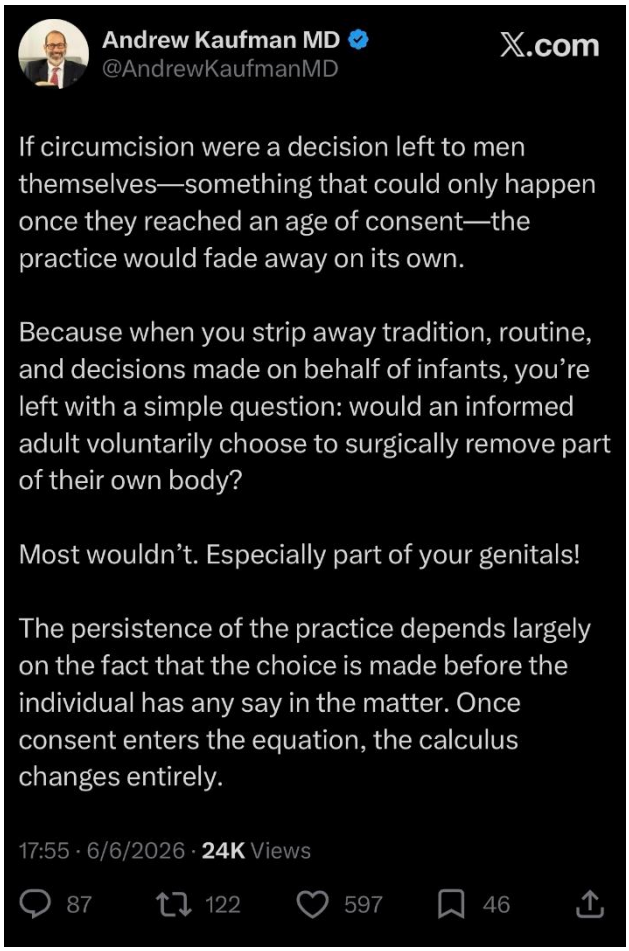
The Kaufman Claim and the Consent Frame

Khitān [Male Circumcision], *Fiṭrah* [the Natural Disposition], and the Failure of Autonomy Rhetoric


Andrew Kaufman MD
@AndrewKaufmanMD
X.com
If circumcision were a decision left to men themselves—something that could only happen once they reached an age of consent—the practice would fade away on its own.
Because when you strip away tradition, routine, and decisions made on behalf of infants, you're left with a simple question: would an informed adult voluntarily choose to surgically remove part of their own body?
Most wouldn't. Especially part of your genitals!
The persistence of the practice depends largely on the fact that the choice is made before the individual has any say in the matter. Once consent enters the equation, the calculus changes entirely.
17:55 · 6/6/2026 · 24K Views
87
122
597
46

Introduction

A recent anti-circumcision argument of Dr. Andrew Kaufman claims that if male circumcision were delayed until men reached an age of consent, the practice would fade away by itself. Dr. Andrew Kaufman asks whether an informed adult man would voluntarily choose to "surgically remove part of his own body," especially from his genitals, and then concludes that circumcision persists largely because the decision is made before the child can object.

At first glance, this sounds like a simple appeal to compassion and personal choice. In reality, it is not a neutral argument. It is a secular moral framework presented as common sense. It assumes that adult

autonomy is the highest moral category, that parental religious guardianship is inherently suspect, and that inherited bodily practices become irrational once modern individual consent is made supreme.

That is not an argument Muslims are obliged to accept of course. Nor is it an argument that fair-minded non-Muslims should accept without scrutiny.

The author has not proven that *Khitān* [male circumcision] is irrational, medically worthless, religiously baseless, or morally outside the authority of parents. He has merely stripped the practice of its religious, legal, hygienic, historical, and communal meaning, redescribed it in the most emotionally charged bodily language possible, and then asked the reader to step back. That is a classic example of framing.

A fair word to non-Muslim readers

A non-Muslim reader may not accept the authority of the *Qurʾān*, the *Sunnah*, or Islamic jurisprudence. That is understood. But intellectual fairness still requires him to recognize that Muslims are not defending a meaningless surgical habit. They are reasoning from a revealed moral order in which the body, family, childhood, purity, and parental duty have meanings that differ from modern secular autonomy.

A critic may reject that framework. But he should not pretend that the framework does not exist.

Nor should he reduce a prophetic practice to "genital cutting" and then call that analysis.

The first error: treating consent as the only moral category

The central weakness of the argument is that it treats consent as though it were the only principle by which parental action may be judged.

But infants do not consent to anything.

They do not consent to their names. They do not consent to their languages. They do not consent to being raised within a religion, a family structure, a diet, a discipline, an education, a moral code, or a hygiene routine. They do not consent to medical care, dental care, being withheld from dangers, being moved from one country to another, or being formed by the customs of their people.

Yet no serious person concludes from this that all parental decision-making is oppression.

The real question is not, "Did the infant consent?" Infants cannot consent. The real question is: did the guardian act within a sound moral framework, with legitimate authority, recognized benefit, avoidance of harm, and accountability before our Lord, Allāh?

Islam answers this question through concepts deeper than the modern slogan of bodily autonomy. It recognizes *Wilāyah* [lawful guardianship], *Amānah* [sacred entrusted responsibility], *Fiṭrah* [the natural disposition], *Ṭahārah* [purity], *Sunnah* [prophetic practice], *Maṣlaḥah* [recognized benefit], and the prohibition of *Ḍarar* [harm].

So, the critic's argument is defective from the beginning. It assumes that because the child does not personally consent, the parental act is morally illegitimate. That assumption does not follow. It would invalidate too

much of ordinary childhood, religious upbringing, and parental responsibility.

The Islamic view of the body is not secular self-ownership

The author's argument depends on a hidden doctrine: that the body belongs absolutely to the individual, and that the adult self alone gives moral meaning to what may or may not be done to it.

Islam does not accept that doctrine.

In Islam, the body is an *Amānah* [sacred entrusted responsibility] from Allāh. The parent does not own the child as property, but the child is not a self-legislating adult whose future preferences cancel the duties of the parent. The parent is a guardian, responsible before Allāh for nurturing the child upon *Dīn* [religion], *Fiṭrah* [the natural disposition], *Ṭahārah* [purity], discipline, mercy, and protection from harm.

This distinction is essential.

The modern critic says, in effect: "Leave the body untouched until the adult self chooses."

Islam says: "Raise the child upon what Allāh has legislated, what the Messenger Moḥammad ﷺ taught, what preserves purity and soundness, and what does not bring unlawful harm."

These are different moral worlds.

A Muslim does not apologize for belonging to the second.

Khitān [Male Circumcision] is not a random cultural surgery

For Muslims, *Khitān* [male circumcision] is not an arbitrary tribal mark, nor a cosmetic habit that survived because nobody thought about it. It is from the practices of *Fiṭrah* [the natural disposition].

The disciple Abū Hurayrah narrated that the Prophet ﷺ [1] said:

الْفِطْرَةُ خَمْسٌ: الْخِتَانُ، وَالِاسْتِحْدَادُ، وَقَصُّ الشَّارِبِ، وَتَقْلِيمُ الْأَظْفَارِ، وَنَتْفُ الْآبَاطِ

"*Five practices are from the Fiṭrah [the natural disposition]: circumcision, shaving the pubic hair, trimming the moustache, clipping the nails, and removing the hair of the armpits.*"

This *Ḥadīth* [Prophetic narration] does not present *Khitān* [male circumcision] as mutilation, barbarism, or meaningless tradition. It places it among practices of bodily purification, grooming, and natural order.

That does not mean that Muslims should speak carelessly. It does not mean the procedure may be done negligently, cruelly, unsafely, or by incompetent hands. It does not mean that pain, timing, aftercare, and risk are irrelevant. Islamic law is not a license for recklessness.

But it does mean that a Muslim discussion begins from revelation and *Fiṭrah* [the natural disposition], not from the anxieties of modern anti-tradition rhetoric.

The word “tradition” is being used dishonestly

The author says that once we strip away “tradition” and “routine,” circumcision becomes difficult to justify.

This is a rhetorical trick.

In secular polemics, “tradition” often means blind repetition. But in Islam, inherited practice is not automatically irrational. Some inherited practices are mere custom. Others are *ʿUrf* [recognized custom]. Others belong to *Sunnah* [prophetic practice]. Others are connected to *Fiṭrah* [the natural disposition]. Others are supported by juristic consensus or by the lived transmission of the Ummah [Muslim world].

A serious critic must distinguish between these categories. He may not simply say “tradition” as if the word itself proves foolishness.

For Muslims, *Khitān* [male circumcision] is not defended because “our ancestors did it.” It is defended because it is rooted in revealed guidance, prophetic practice, the religion of Ibrāhīm/Abraham, and the juristic inheritance of Islam.

Calling that “tradition” does not refute it.

It merely reveals that the critic does not share the same source of moral authority.

The phrase “part of your genitals” is emotional manipulation

The author asks whether an informed adult would voluntarily remove “part of their own body,” especially “part of your genitals.”

This wording is designed to produce disgust before thought begins.

But moral analysis cannot be reduced to shock language. Many legitimate human practices involve cutting, removing, trimming, cleaning, altering, or correcting parts of the body. Nails are cut. Hair is removed. Wounds are cleaned. Teeth may be extracted. Diseased tissue may be removed. Medical correction may be performed. Hygienic practices may involve the removal of bodily matter. The question is never merely, “Was something removed?” The question is: what was removed, why was it removed, under what authority, by what method, with what benefit, with what risk, and according to what moral framework?

The critic’s language tries to make the conclusion feel obvious. But feeling is not proof.

The fact that circumcision concerns the genitals means the discussion requires dignity, caution, and modesty. It does not mean the practice becomes automatically immoral.

The adult-consent claim is empirically false

The author's strongest factual claim is that if men had to choose circumcision as adults, the practice would fade away.

This is just an assumption and a weak prediction.

Adult men do choose circumcision. They choose it for religious reasons. They choose it after accepting Islam. They choose it for medical reasons such as recurrent inflammation, pathological tightness of the foreskin, scarring, pain, or urination difficulty. They choose it in cultures where circumcision marks religious or communal identity. They have also chosen it in large numbers in certain public-health contexts. WHO states that about 37.5 million men have accessed **voluntary** medical male circumcision services across 15 priority countries in sub-Saharan Africa.[2]

This single fact breaks the claim. The author said consent changes the calculus so completely that the practice would fade. Reality says otherwise.

One does not need to make medicine the foundation of the Islamic ruling in order to use this evidence correctly. The point is narrower: the claim that adult consent would make circumcision disappear is false.

If adult men never chose circumcision, the critic might have a stronger sociological argument. But they do. Therefore, his prediction collapses.

Medical evidence should not be exaggerated by either side

A disciplined Muslim refutation should not overcorrect by making exaggerated medical claims.

Circumcision is not a magical shield against disease. It is not a substitute for chastity, lawful marriage, cleanliness, modesty, restraint, or personal responsibility. Its public-health evidence is strongest in specific settings. Those findings should not be lazily universalized across every society and every risk profile.

But the opposite error is also unacceptable. It is false to imply that circumcision has no adult rationale, no medical indications, and no evidence-based public-health use. Adult circumcision may be medically considered for recurrent infections, balanitis, phimosis, inability to retract the foreskin, scarring, tightness, painful erections, difficulty urinating, or other specific conditions. In certain public-health settings, voluntary medical male circumcision has been adopted at scale by adult men.[3]

Therefore, the honest position is this: the medical evidence must be kept in its proper place. It neither replaces revelation nor disappears because activists dislike the practice.

The critic has not met the burden of proof

A serious critic of *Khitān* [male circumcision] must prove more than discomfort.

> He must prove that the practice is religiously baseless. **He has not.**
> He must prove that parental guardianship has no authority in such matters. **He has not.**
> He must prove that the absence of infant consent automatically nullifies religious parental duties. **He has not.**
> He must prove that adult men would not choose circumcision when properly informed. **He has not.**
> He must prove that circumcision has no medical, hygienic, cultural, or public-health rationale. **He has not.**
> He must prove that the Islamic framework of *Fiṭrah* [the natural disposition], *Wilāyah* [lawful guardianship], and *Ṭahārah* [purity] is morally inferior to modern individual autonomy. **He has not even attempted to do so.**

Instead, he has replaced argument with insinuation: "Would you really remove part of your genitals?"

That question may unsettle an audience already trained to view all inherited bodily religion with suspicion. But it does not defeat the case.

What we should and should not say

We, as Muslims, should not answer this issue with embarrassment. We should not reduce *Khitān* [male circumcision] to a desperate search for medical approval. Nor should we speak as if prophetic practice must wait for modern institutions to certify its moral legitimacy.

At the same time, Muslims should not be reckless. We should not deny the need for safe practice. We should not mock concerns about pain, complications, timing, aftercare, or medical competence. We should not pressure adult converts in a way that makes circumcision feel like a barrier to Islam. The jurists discuss ability, harm, and hardship because the *Sharīʿah* [revealed law] is not blind to circumstance.

The correct position is firm but disciplined:

Khitān [male circumcision] is rooted in Islam. It belongs to *Fiṭrah* [the natural disposition]. It is recognized by the jurists. Parents possess *Wilāyah* [lawful guardianship] over their children and are responsible for raising them upon *Dīn* [religion], *Ṭahārah* [purity], and sound practice. This must be done without negligence, cruelty, or unlawful harm.

That is a far stronger position than apologetic medical neutrality.

Conclusion

The anti-circumcision claim fails at the level of evidence, philosophy, and fairness. It fails evidentially because adult men do choose circumcision for religious, medical, cultural, and public-health reasons. Therefore, the claim that consent would make the practice fade away is speculation, not fact. It fails philosophically because it treats adult autonomy as the only moral category, while ignoring guardianship, religious duty, purity, inherited law, benefit, and harm.

It fails Islamically because *Khitān* [male circumcision] is not an arbitrary cultural habit. It is from *Fiṭrah* [the natural disposition], established in authentic *Sunnah*, recognized by the jurists, and situated within a broader moral vision of the body as an *Amānah* [sacred entrusted responsibility] from Allāh.

A serious discussion may be had about timing, safety, practitioner competence, medical risk, and hardship in individual cases. But the claim under examination is not a serious discussion. It is a secular autonomy argument wrapped in emotional language.

---

[1] Within Islamic etiquette, it is customary to include a specific supplication after mentioning the Prophet Moḥammad. It is often written in the following manner:

{صلى الله عليه وسلم} {*Ṣallā ʾllāhu ʿAlayhi wa Sallam*}

This means, contextually: "*May Allāh's peace and blessings be upon him*."

[2] https://www.who.int/teams/global-hiv-hepatitis-and-stis-programmes/populations/adolescent-boys-and-men

[3] https://www.nhs.uk/tests-and-treatments/circumcision/